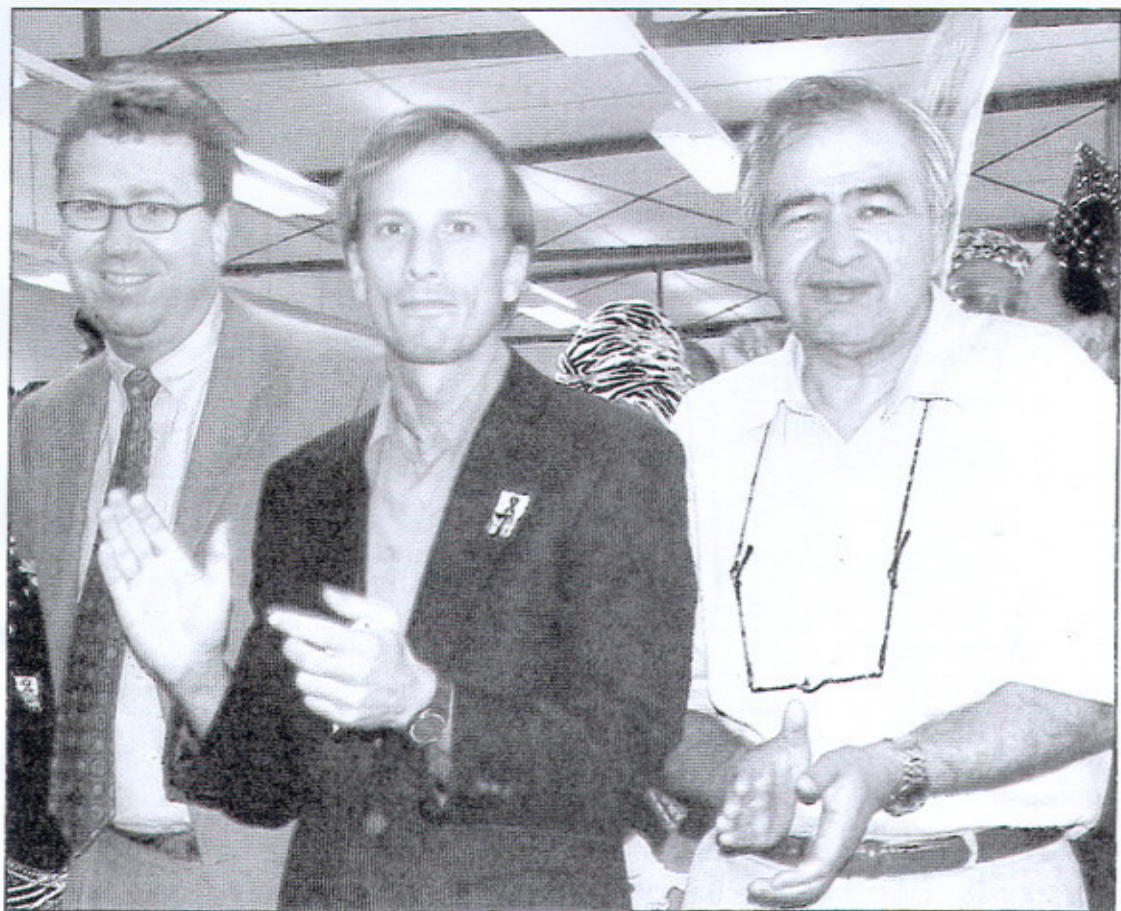


Healers get US assistance

Not alone in fight against HIV/Aids



Side by side in the fight ... Prof Girish Mody (right) the Dean of the Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine, welcomes the US Consul-General, Eugene Young (left) and Dr Mark Dybul, the deputy US Global Aids Co-ordinator, to one of the American-funded HIV/Aids training workshops

PICTURE: PUNE DEVJEE

BARBARA COLE

THIRTY local traditional healers, who are to spread the message about HIV/Aids and its prevention "are not alone", in the fight against the disease, they have been told.

"People often think that it is a South African problem. But we know that you know that it is a global issue," Eugene Young, the Durban-based United States consul-general told a gathering of traditional healers last week.

With the pandemic being "one of the greatest challenges of our time", President

George Bush has set up the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (Pepfar), the largest international health initiative in history by one nation to address a single disease.

South Africa received nearly \$89.3 million (R537.5 million) in 2005 and almost \$148.2 million (R992.1 million) last year to support a comprehensive HIV/Aids prevention treatment and care programme and it is expected that the allocation will grow to \$221.5 million (R1.3 billion) this year.

The Pepfar programmes are closely run with the South African government as well

as with city health departments.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal has also received funding to expand its collaboration with the traditional healers in eThekweni, and the 30 members of the local steering group will soon be passing on their knowledge to people in the various communities they serve.

They have been refining their training at workshops, one of which was visited by Young, as well as the Dr Mark Dybul, the Washington-based deputy US Global Aids Co-ordinator.

Dybul thanked the traditional healers for dedicating

themselves to the fight against Aids. "Only together will we win," he told them.

The traditional healers will promote and provide HIV/Aids services, including counselling and testing.

Their support will expand access to HIV prevention information in both urban and rural communities.

"The project will also support the collaborative development and implementation of culturally appropriate prevention messages as well as common clinical guidelines for the management of HIV and Aids by traditional healers," said a statement from Young's office.